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# Teens Daily Breeze turn to cleaner as drug

**SANITIZERS:** Using the liquids to get drunk poses a health risk, officials warn.

By Susan Abram Staff Writer

Local teenagers are gulping down hand sanitizer to get drunk — and many are landing in emergency departments instead, health experts warned Tuesday.

Though it's been a national trend for the past few years, Los Angeles teenagers have caught on more recently. Sixteen cases countywide have been reported to the California Poison Control System since March 1 and 60 statewide since 2010, health officials said.

"This is a rapidly emerging trend," said Dr. Cyrus Rangan, a pediatric medical toxicologist with Children's Hospital Los Angeles, who also is director of the county Department of Public Health's Toxic Epidemiology Program.

One small bottle of hand sanitizer contains 60 percent alcohol, or at least 120 proof, Rangan said.

"That's like drinking several shots of hard liquor," Rangan said.

While none of the local cases so far has been fatal, Rangan said the effects of drinking the product are similar to abusing liquor. Too much can prove dangerous, causing coma.

So far, there are no regulations that prohibit those under a certain age from buying sanitizer, such as with other products, but Rangan said it could happen.

"I would not be surprised if something like that happened down the road," he said.

Teenagers have learned to separate the alcohol from the rest of the product's ingredients by using bath salts. They get the information online, said Helen Arbogast, an injury prevention coordinator for Children's Hospital, where Tuesday's press conference was held.

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While teenagers drink sanitizer to get drunk, younger children will ingest it because the product's colors may look like juice or something sweet, she said.

"Just a spoonful can cause a problem," she said. "It's a concern for us. We're going to be going to the high schools to talk about it."

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# New trouble emerges for county agency

Some workers in the child welfare unit filed improper mileage reports, review finds.

By GARRETT THEROLF

Forty percent of surveyed employees at Los Angeles County's troubled child welfare agency improperly received mileage reimbursements from taxpayers on days they did not work, according to a sample of reimbursement reports for 20 employees with high mileage claims examined by the county auditor-controller.

Thirteen supervisors responsible for signing off on the reports acknowledged that they routinely did not review them first, the study found. The majority of reviewed reports vastly overstated the distance between travel points, and nearly half the reviewed reimbursement requests lacked basic information.

The department has 3,000 employees who use their personal vehicles for county business, and taxpayers reimbursed them \$7.7 million during the last fiscal year alone.

County Auditor-Controller Wendy Watanabe said "significant weaknesses" in reimbursement procedures had fostered fraud and "may have been prevented with proper management oversight."

After the report was issued online, however, she cautioned that her audit was based on a "non-scientific sample" and said that the 20 reviewed employees had been selected because they had "historically higher than

average amounts of mileage reimbursement requests."

The findings were based on a detailed review of records for the 20 employees and mark the latest in a series of management breakdowns at the Department of Children and Family Services, which oversees care of tens of thousands of abused or neglected minors. The agency has struggled in recent years to properly manage mistreatment investigations.

[See Mileage, AA4]



## Mileage reports targeted

[Mileage, from AA4] tions and children living under its oversight — and breakdowns have contributed to dozens of fatalities.

In an effort to revitalize the agency, Los Angeles County supervisors appointed Philip Browning in February to be the department's first permanent director in more than a year. Browning moved in recent weeks to fill vacancies in the department's executive team, which was decimated by resignations over the course of persistent scandals in recent years.

The auditor's report noted that Browning's team, which reviewed the mileage findings in draft form months ago, had already issued new guidelines and procedures to prevent future abuse of the reimbursement system, including a computer program that automatically calculates the distance between two points.

"The audit certainly highlights a lack of accountability," Browning said. "People just aren't using common sense. Frankly, we don't have any tolerance for people who falsify records."

Numerous employees were terminated or received suspensions as a result of the audit's findings, he said. Allegations against three staffers — including one woman who forged her boss' signature on a falsified mileage claim — were also referred to the Los Angeles County district attorney's office for possible criminal prosecution.

Decisions to remove children or reunite them with their families rely heavily on reports by the department's social workers, but the quality of the workforce has been often cited as a concern.

Criminal checks of employees have been lax, according to another recent audit, and no one in memory has flunked out of the department's training academy, according to recent statements by agency officials.

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## Secret clique in sheriff's unit probed

A document describes the Jump Out Boys as a group that regards officers' shootings as badges of honor.

By ROBERT FATURECHI

Los Angeles County sheriff's detectives have launched a probe into what appears to be a secret deputy clique within the department's elite gang unit, an investigation triggered by the discovery of a document suggesting the group embraces shootings as a badge of honor.

The document described a code of conduct for the Jump Out Boys, a clique of hard-charging, aggressive deputies who gain more respect after being involved in a shooting, according to sources with knowledge of the investigation. The pamphlet is relatively short, sources said, and explains that deputies earn admission into the group through

the endorsement of members.

The sources stressed that the internal affairs investigation is still in its early stages and that little is known about the Jump Out Boys' behavior or its membership.

Still, sheriff's officials are concerned that the group represents another unsanctioned clique within the department's ranks, a problem the department has been grappling with for decades.

Last year, the department fired a group of deputies who all worked on the third, or "3000," floor of Men's Central Jail, after the group fought two fellow deputies at an employee Christmas party and allegedly punched a female deputy in the face. Sheriff's officials later said the men had formed an aggressive "3000" clique that used gang-like three-finger hand signs. A former top jail commander told The Times that jailers would "earn their ink" by breaking inmates' bones.

Other cliques — with

[See Sheriff, A15]



# Secret sheriff's clique probed

[**Sheriff**, from A1] names like Grim Reapers, Little Devils, Regulators and Vikings — have been accused of breeding a gang-like mentality in which deputies falsify police reports, perjure themselves and cover up misconduct.

The investigation into the Jump Out Boys is focused on the sheriff's Gang Enforcement Team. The unit is divided into two platoons of relatively autonomous deputies whose job it is to target neighborhoods where gang violence and intimidation are a concern.

The sources, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because the case was ongoing, described parts of the memo to *The Times*. The pamphlet extols hard work and other positive virtues, but there is concern that some of the language conflicts with department expectations.

Most notably, sources said, was a positive depiction of officer-involved shootings. A distinction is made, sources said, between cops who have and cops who have not been involved in shootings.

But the attitude is troubling because officer-involved shootings, even those that are within policy, are expected by the department to be treated as events of last resort. Sheriff's officials have warned against forming rogue subgroups because they threaten to stress allegiance to the clique and subvert loyalty to the department and its policies.

Sheriff Lee Baca's spokesman said the department is taking the issue seriously, and detectives are gathering evidence and conducting interviews.

"We're going to be looking at this right now, but it really could be a fantasy, something that's not true but right now we're going to find out exactly what is and what isn't and that will determine what our next step is,"

**'The last thing anybody wants to do in law enforcement is shoot a weapon.'**

— **STEVE WHITMORE**,  
Sheriff's Department  
spokesman

spokesman Steve Whitmore said.

Whitmore declined to discuss details of the investigation or the contents of the document. Asked about the language that portrays shootings in a positive light, he said, "The last thing anybody wants to do in law enforcement is shoot a weapon."

Whitmore said Baca understands that deputies might bond and form social groups with close co-work-

ers but prohibits cliques when "it does not embrace the integrity to do what is right."

Historically, within the Sheriff's Department, the groups have been tied to patrol stations. In one instance, a federal judge called one of those groups, the Lynwood Vikings, a "neo-Nazi, white supremacist gang" that had engaged in racially motivated hostility. As part of a 1996 settlement, the county agreed to retrain deputies to prevent such conduct and pay \$7.5 million to compensate victims of alleged abuses.

Past affiliation with such groups reaches the highest levels of the department. Baca acknowledged last year that his second-in-command, Paul Tanaka, has a Vikings tattoo. Tanaka has said the Vikings was a nickname for deputies assigned to Lynwood station and did not represent anything sin-

ister.

In February, *The Times* reported allegations that a supervisor inside the sheriff's Compton station aimed a gun at the head of a fellow sergeant, who alleged the threat was part of a vendetta motivated by ties to a secret deputy clique.

Maria Haberfeld, a professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York who specializes in police ethics and training, said police subcultures can provide officers with much needed support in a dangerous job. But she said that closeness can become problematic.

"Solidarity is one of the main things of police subculture," she said, "so the closer the group, the higher the possibility that various cases of misconduct will be covered up."

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## Teens drink hand wash

[**Alcohol**, from AA1] emergency room.

Doctors said this is the latest over-the-counter product that teenagers have adapted for a quick high. Teenagers have done the same with mouthwash, cough syrup and even vanilla extract.

"Over the years, they have ingested all sorts of things," said Helen Arbogast, injury prevention coordinator in the trauma program at Children's Hospital Los Angeles. "Cough syrup had reached a very sexy point where young people were using it.... We want to be sure this doesn't take on the same trend."

**'It is kind of scary that they go to that extent to get a shot of essentially hard liquor.'**

— **CYRUS RANGAN**,  
county public health  
department

The recent cases involving teenagers surprised doctors. There were no such cases last year. The incidents also raised concerns about the lack of awareness among parents of the risks linked to the popular hygiene product. Even small bottles contain highly concentrated alcohol.

If parents buy hand sanitizer, they should purchase the foam version rather than the gel type because it is harder to extract the alcohol and teenagers may be less likely to drink it, Arbogast said.

Parents also shouldn't leave hand sanitizer around the house and should monitor it like any other liquor or medicine.

They should also watch for signs of intoxication, she said.

"When young people are actively and purposely ingesting it, that is when it becomes a real concern," she said.

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# Cyber security overkill

THE ENGINEERS WHO designed the Internet focused on connection and communication, not safety and security. That's one reason hackers have been able to take surreptitious control of Internet-connected devices, cripple websites and steal valuable data. Now, lawmakers are considering whether to vastly expand the government's role in protecting Internet services and corporate computer networks against cyber attack. But while the online security threats are serious, encouraging private industry to funnel information to the government poses its own set of problems.

Disturbed by reports of Chinese hackers brazenly raiding U.S. corporate networks to steal trade secrets and track dissidents, the House is expected to take up a bill this week that would allow companies and the government to share more cyber security tips and techniques. The noncontroversial part of the proposal would let federal intelligence agencies disclose sensitive information about cyber threats to utilities, Internet service providers and corporate network operators. The controversial part would encourage private industry to monitor any and all activity on their networks for cyber security problems and share even potentially sensitive personal information they collect with the feds.

The bill's authors — the top Republican and Democrat on the House intelligence committee — are so eager to beef up the private sector's defenses, they would waive

wiretapping rules, privacy regulations and all other laws to let companies use vaguely defined "cyber security systems" to obtain information about cyber threats and share it with anyone, including the Department of Homeland Security. To accommodate the rapid changes in technology and hacking methods, the measure broadly defines the information that companies could monitor, collect and share in the name of cyber security without fear of liability.

To their credit, leaders of the intelligence committee have tried to address privacy advocates' concerns. But the bill's fundamental problem is that encouraging the operators of broadband services, email systems and social networks to collect information about their users and share it with the government transforms them from service providers to surveillance agencies.

A better approach would be to address directly the software vulnerabilities of the Internet and the devices that connect to it. Having companies do a better job minimizing their exposure to hackers and keeping their software up to date is at least as important as having them monitor their networks. And if companies want to share what they learn about cyber attacks — some may not because they believe that information gives them a competitive advantage — they should do so without including personally identifiable information, and without handing the data to federal enforcement agencies that might be tempted to look for something other than hackers.

# A troubling trend in teens drinking hand sanitizer

By ANNA GORMAN

Six teenagers have shown up in two San Fernando Valley emergency rooms in the last few months with alcohol poisoning after drinking hand sanitizer, worrying public health officials who say the cases could signal a dangerous trend.

Some of the teenagers used salt to separate the alcohol from the sanitizer, making a potent drink that is similar to a shot of hard liquor.

"All it takes is just a few swallows and you have a drunk teenager," said Cyrus Rangan, director of the toxicology bureau for the county public health department and a medical toxicology consultant for Children's Hospital Los Angeles. "There is no question that it

is dangerous." Although there have been only a handful of cases, Rangan said the problem could easily become a problem. Bottles of hand sanitizer are inexpensive and accessible, and teenagers can find distillation instructions on the Internet. "It is kind of scary that they go to that extent to get a shot of essentially hard liquor," Rangan said.

In addition to the teenagers who intentionally drank the sanitizer, younger children also have accidentally ingested it in the past. The liquid hand sanitizer is 62% ethyl alcohol and makes a 120-proof liquid. A few drinks can cause a person's speech to slur and make stomach to burn, and make people so drunk that they have to be monitored in the hospital.

[See Alcohol, AA4]



LARA SOFT Associated Press

GEL HAND SANITIZER is being distilled to make 120-proof alcohol, and six teenagers were recently taken to emergency rooms after drinking some.